

FLORIDA TROPICAL HOUSE
Beverly Shores Century of Progress
Architectural District *(moved from Chicago, IL)*
250 Lake Front Drive
Beverly Shores
Porter County
Indiana

HABS NO. IN-242

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

FLORIDA TROPICAL HOUSE

HABS No. IN-242

Location: 250 West Lake Front Drive, north side, Beverly Shores, Porter County, Indiana.
Lot 8 Block 187 in Robert Bartlett's subdivision Unit I.

Present Owner: National Park Service

Present Occupant: Elizabeth Scriba and her daughter, Alice Connor.

Significance: The Florida Tropical House is one of five houses from the Home and Industrial Arts Group moved at the end of the fair by Robert Bartlett to his lakeside subdivision at Beverly Shores, Indiana. The Florida Tropical House was the only state-sponsored building in the group and was designed to illustrate the luxuries of life in a semi-tropical climate.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1933

2. Architect: Robert Law Weed, architect. Weed was a prominent Miami-based architect responsible for the design of Burdine's department store in Miami Beach¹ and several Miami homes including the J. B. Moos house.²

Paist and Steward, associate architects.
Mackey W. White, supervising architect.

3. Original and subsequent owners, occupants, uses: The house was built by the state of Florida. After the close of the fair in 1934 it was sold to Robert Bartlett Realty Company and transported to Beverly Shores. In 1938 Robert Bartlett had not yet sold the house but had rented it to Judge and Mrs.

¹ "Portfolio of Current Building Types," Architectural Record 79 (May 1936), 381-387.

² "Miami Beach: 'Story of a Mangrove Swamp'," American Architect 147 (August 1935): 11-30.

Cecil Smith.³ In the 1927-1947 Transfer Book, Robert Bartlett is listed as the owner of the house. A newspaper article, however, reported that in 1946 the house was owned and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Winogrand when it suffered a fire caused by a defective fireplace on September 30, 1946.⁴ In September, 1957, the house was sold by Peter Romaine S. et. al to Vets J. and Charlotte M. Radis.⁵ Mr. and Mrs. Radis sold the house to Herbert C. and Florence P. Hillabold in August 1958 who, in turn, sold it to Robert M. and Elizabeth H. Scriba in April, 1963. The Scribas sold the property to the U.S. Government on November 9, 1970, retaining a fifteen-year Reservation of Use (ROU). After the death of her husband in 1985, Elizabeth Scriba debated about extending the ROU and finally sold a nine-year extension of the ROU to her daughter and son-in-law, Alice and Charles Connor on November 6, 1985.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The house was built by Deigaard & Preston of Miami, Florida.

A.H. Ramsey & Son, doors, trim and baseboard
Aluminum Company of America, all aluminum material
Arrow-Hart & Hegemann Elec. Co., electrical installation
Art Cement Co., stucco paint
B. Mifflin-Hood Company, tile-second story decks, firts floor
loggia
Burton Swartz Cypress, lumber
Campbell Casement Window Co., casement windows
Florida Portland Cement Co., cement
John Caretti & Co., tile setting
J.S. Heath & Co., staircase and railings
Koppers Products Company, roofing
L.F. Owen Company, stone walks
Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Co., window plate glass
Milcor Steel Company, expanded metal lath
Ohio Hydrate & Supply Co., Ohio hydrated lime and Ohio
ritewall base-coat plaster.
Stanley Works, hardware on doors
Tamms-Silica Company, paint exterior
The Rolscreen Company, rolscreens
Vitrolite Company, vitrolite in kitchen, bath and fireplace
Yale & Towne, butts and locks

³ "Chicagoans Buy Beverly Home; to Open Tea-Room," Michigan City (Indiana) News-Dispatch, 1 September 1938, 8.

⁴ "Chicago World Fair Home in Beverly Shores Burns; \$500 damage," Michigan City (Indiana) News-Dispatch, 1 October 1946, 1.

⁵ 1956-64 Porter County Transfer Book.

5. Original plans and construction: The first floor of the Florida Tropical House originally consisted of a kitchen, butler's pantry, living room, dining room, loggia, two bedrooms and a full bathroom. The second story was designed with only one enclosed room, a balcony accessed from stairs in the living room. The architect, however, envisioned the roof deck surrounding the balcony as a series of unenclosed "rooms" with separate functions. To the left of the balcony was a sun deck with an aluminum-framed awning and to the right was an uncovered "recreation deck" with a tiled floor. Connecting the two was a "living deck" where meals, brought to the roof via a dumb waiter in the butler's pantry, could be eaten. This area was protected by a reinforced-concrete cantilevered overhang.⁶

6. Alterations and additions: In between the 1933 and 1934 season, the interior architecture of the Florida House was altered slightly. The bathroom has been significantly changed since the 1933 season when a promotional brochure was prepared. In a photograph of the bathroom, the fixtures are of plain white porcelain enamel manufactured by the Crane Company. The Tarnia tub was sunk into the floor with its rim projecting six inches above the floor. At the end of the tub was a small built-in stand of black and white Vitrolite and surrounding it was plate glass screen.⁷ By 1934, however, it looked quite similar to the way it does today with a tub resting on floor level. Fixtures from the 1934 season that remain in the house include a small medicine-cabinet in the wall next to the tub for holding shampoo and soap, and a mirror and shelf combination that has been moved from the wall containing the shower to a perpendicular wall. During this period, the built-in bookcases in the living room appear to have been covered with drywall. They reappear in the house at Beverly Shores.

The move to Beverly Shores changed the configuration of the kitchen significantly and completely eliminated the butler's pantry. The basement which now contains living quarters was added when the house was moved to Beverly Shores in order to anchor the house into the dune on which it was placed. To gain access to the basement, stairs replaced the butler's pantry at the western end of the kitchen; a powder room was added at that time.

⁶ James S. Kuhne and Percival Goodman, First and Second Floor Plans, The Florida Tropical Home at a Century of Progress 1933 (New York: Kuhne Galleries, 1933): n.p.

⁷ Frank Sohn, "Bathroom," in Kuhne and Goodman, n.p.

An exterior straight-run stair has been added to connect the back porch to the beach.

The glass-enclosed loggia, once a more integral part of the house's interior space, has become a screened-in porch.

At the Century of Progress Exposition, a concrete and stucco wall extended from the house and surrounded the entrance to the garage. This does not appear to have been rebuilt after the move to Beverly Shores.

B. Historical Context:

In the winter and spring of 1934, sixteen buildings were brought by barge and by truck from the site of the 1933-34 Century of Progress Exposition to Robert Bartlett's subdivision at Beverly Shores, Indiana. In an attempt to capitalize on the fair's success, Bartlett reestablished a small exhibition of model houses along Lake Front Drive in Beverly Shores. Understanding the importance of the fair to Chicago and to Depression-era America is crucial for comprehending the significance of the houses for Bartlett and for those who purchased land at Beverly Shores.

1. The Florida Tropical House

The Florida House was the only state-sponsored house in the Home and Industrial Arts group. In addition to sponsoring the house, the state published a booklet with an introductory message by Governor David Sholtz. The interior designer James S. Kuhne, saw the Century of Progress project as a "'Florida Play Ground' [that] called for a house suiting the taste of the well to do and who could appreciate the background for their play indoors as well as outdoors." (Kuhne 2). Unlike most of the houses in the Home and Industrial Arts group, the Florida House made no pretense of appealing to families with limited means. It was a luxury house meant to embody an image of success and well-being promoted by the house's sponsors.

Unlike many modernist designs, the Florida House was not intended to be a universal form easily placed on any site; it was built specifically with the needs of a Florida resident in mind. The effect of Florida's tropical climate on the design of the house is particularly evident in the architects own comments. He writes:

In the design of the "Florida House" the problems peculiar to Florida in the construction of residential buildings have been controlling factors. The first requisite being substantial, permanent, and water-proof materials; and second, the plan being as open as possible, consistent with storm proof construction.

These two major considerations are reflected in the construction and planning.⁸

The objective of using substantial construction appropriate for a tropical climate was met by the use of reinforced concrete and concrete building tiles, materials that perform well in climates without quick temperature changes and freezes. As Weed noted in his essay, the use of materials produced in Florida was a consideration for this project. As a result, Portland cement, Florida travertine, Florida limestone, aggregate, clay flooring, and roofing tile manufactured in Florida were all used in the construction of the house.⁹

Another concern addressed in the Florida Tropical House is the perception that modern-style houses were sterile, feeling more like a hotel than a home. The interior designers tried to counter this perception by using wallpaper; "[t]here's an atmosphere about wallpaper that gives charm to any room where it is properly employed--and at the Fair it has been expertly chosen to supply the home-like motif."¹⁰

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Florida Tropical House is a Moderne structure with its geometric forms, ziggurat-shaped brackets, and ocean-liner inspired aluminum railings and portal windows. Its concrete and pink stucco construction refer to the particular needs of a sub-tropical climate.

2. Condition of fabric: Good. The house is well-maintained inside and out. However, there is extensive structural damage, to the foundation. There is cracking in the north-south walls caused by sliding on the north side of the foundation. The floor slopes toward the lake, dropping an inch to an inch and a half in the five feet from the north wall.

⁸Robert Law Weed, "Structural Design in the Florida Tropical House," in James S. Kuhne and Percival Goodman, The Florida Tropical Home at a Century of Progress 1933 (New York: Kuhne Galleries, 1933): n.p.

⁹ Weed in Florida Tropical House

¹⁰ Henry Bosch, "Wall Paper in the Modern Home," in Kuhne and Goodman, n.p.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 85' x 35'
2. Foundations: Concrete block with a light stucco covering.
3. Walls: Bearing walls are of concrete building tile with an exterior finishing of Portland Cement stucco.
4. Structural system, framing: The house is constructed using reinforced concrete and wall tile. Interior walls are plastered and exterior walls are finished in cement stucco.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: The house has a screened-in porch in the central bay of the first floor of its lakeside facade. In a view of the house while it was at the Century of Progress Exposition, the porch (called the loggia in the plans) appears to have been enclosed with permanent sheets of glass and aluminum pillars, thus making it more a part of the house than an exterior porch.

The entire flat roof was originally to be used as a deck area. A sun deck with an aluminum-framed awning, an uncovered "recreation deck" with a tiled floor, and a "living deck" protected by a reinforced-concrete cantilevered overhang were meant to be an extension of the interior space." Doors from an interior balcony open onto the roof that it is no longer used as a deck. A straight-run stair on the eastern end of the deck leads to the ground.

6. Chimneys: Masonry chimney.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: There are two main entrances on the first floor: the kitchen door and the entrance under the aluminum stairs in the living room. Two sets of double French doors lead from the dining area and the living area to the screened-in porch. A similar pair of French doors leads from the balcony to the roof deck. The garage has an overhead door.

b. Windows and shutters: All original windows have steel casings. The roadside facade is dominated by a series of casement windows that form a huge tri-partite arrangement. The central area is composed of two columns

¹¹ First and Second Floor Plans, James S. Kuhne and Percival Goodman, The Florida Tropical Home at a Century of Progress 1933 (New York: Kuhne Galleries, 1933): n.p.

of three double casements. On either side, three vertically-stacked double casements are separated from the central area by concrete piers. The heads of all of the windows are placed directly against the ceiling in an attempt to aid ventilation. The roadside facade also has windows on its west end consisting of a series of three sets of windows each with a top and bottom awning window and a center fixed light. On the opposite end of the facade, one small sash window with two lights and two awning windows with roll-down screens.

The west facade consists of two sets of two combination awning and fixed-light windows, one at either end of the facade. In between them are two small awning windows stacked on top of one another. The east facade is dominated by the garage and contains no windows on either the first or second stories.

The first floor of the lakeside facade has three sets of two awning windows and three sets of windows each with a top and bottom awning window and a center fixed light. The second floor of the lakeside facade contains two porthole windows and two awning windows, one type stacked on top of one another. Several windows have been added at the basement level.

Cantilevered slabs that are an integral part of the ceiling slabs project approximately four feet over all exterior openings in place of ordinary attached awnings. They were meant to protect the house from the sun and to allow the windows to be left open in ordinary rain.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The house has a flat roof meant to be used as a deck. Originally the roof surfaces were insulated with half-inch thick Celotex and finished with clay tile set on sand and graded to drain to leaders. The current roof is covered with tar and may have felt insulation. The roof-deck is enclosed with aluminum railings anchored directly to beams that form the coping. SEE DETAIL OF WINDOWS, RAILINGS AND OVERHANGS.

b. Cornice, eaves: The house has a deep cantilevered concrete overhang on the second floor of its lakeside facade. It is supported by five ziggurat-shaped concrete brackets. Cantilevered slabs that are an integral part of the ceiling slabs project approximately four feet over all exterior openings in place of attached awnings.

c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans:

As it was built at the Century of Progress Exposition, most of the living space for the Florida House was contained on the first floor. From the roadside, the house could be entered through a door in the living room or a door in the kitchen. The kitchen had access to the garage and was subdivided into a cooking area and a pantry. From the pantry, one could enter the dining area that had access to the porch. One could either continue across the porch and enter the living room via a set of French doors or could enter the living room through a door in the dining area. The living room led to the bedroom wing of the house where two bedrooms were linked by a bathroom.

The house does not have a complete second story; the stair in the living room leads to a balcony that has doors opening onto the roof deck. In a house that responds so closely to climate, one could consider the entire balcony and roof area as a series of unenclosed rooms.

When the house was moved to Beverly Shores it was placed on a concrete foundation that has been converted into a downstairs living area accessible by stairs off of the kitchen. The area contains two bedrooms, a living room, utility room, bathroom, changing room, and a wide hallway with cooking and laundry facilities.

2. Stairways: The focal point of the interior of the house is a large, straight-run, aluminum, open-string stair leading from the living room to a balcony. The stair and balcony rails are also aluminum.

3. Flooring: The living room floor was originally of Florida travertine. It is currently covered with carpeting as are the floors in the dining room, kitchen and two bedrooms. The floor of the bathroom is black tile and the balcony floor is vinyl tile.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Most original interior walls were plastered. Walls in the bathroom for the 1933 season were covered in white, pale green and black structural glass. On the first floor, three of the walls in the dining room are painted pink plaster; the fourth wall is covered with a wallpaper mural. Original striping around the windows can still be seen through the paint. The walls of the kitchen, living room, and two bedrooms are painted plaster. The walls in the bathroom appear to be painted masonite. The walls of the upstairs balcony are painted plaster.

The ceiling in the living room, kitchen, living room, balcony and two bedrooms is painted plaster. In the living room, five rectangular beams run across the ceiling. The bathroom ceiling is some kind of synthetic material.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Interior doors do not appear to be original.

b. Windows: The enclosed porch contains two deep recesses for windows from the area surrounding the fireplace in the living room. Each recess contains three casement windows.

6. Decorative features and trim: The striping around the dining room window visible through a thin coat of white paint may be original.

7. Hardware: Door handles and nickel silver back plates in the Florida House are identical to those found at the Rostone House and the House of Tomorrow.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: Originally, the house contained a fireplace built around a "heatilator," a device designed to increase the fireplace as an efficient heat source that eliminated heat loss through the fireplace by discharging warm air back into the room through holes further up the masonry. The fireplace itself was made of aluminum. K.D. Jaquith saw this feature as an important part of the image of the home: "The open fireplace has long been one of the most important features of the southern home--a symbol of charm and gracious hospitality."¹² The house now has two furnaces, one gas and one oil, and forced air heat with wall vents.

b. Lighting: None of the original interior light fixtures are in place. The dining room contains a pole lamp and a chandelier. Chandeliers, floor lamps and table lamps light the living room. Other room are lit by wall sconces, overhead lights, and table lamps. Wiring for six exterior wall sconces, four on the upstairs deck and two on the porch, may be original.

¹²K.D. Jaquith "Heatilator Open Fire Place," in Kuhne and Goodman, n.p.

c. Plumbing: The house has one bathroom upstairs with fixtures from the 1934 fair season. A second toilet was added off of the kitchen at the top of the basement stairs when the house was moved to Beverly Shores. The bathroom shower in the basement does not drain.

9. Architectural Furniture: There is extensive built-in storage in the roadside bedroom. Bookcases in the living room appear to have been built for the house in 1933; they were covered for the 1934 fair season but reappeared at Beverly Shores. The kitchen cabinets are identical to those at the Armco-Ferro house suggesting that they were installed by Bartlett to replace cabinets that may have been removed by the displaying manufacturers after the close of the fair.

D. Site

1. Historic landscape design:

The original site of the Florida Tropical House at the Century of Progress Exposition included garden walls and flagging made of Florida quarrykey stone. Palm trees and other tropical plants were planted on the grounds in order to suggest a Florida location. The house was moved to Lake Front Drive in Beverly Shores from its original site at the 1933-34 Chicago Century of Progress Exposition along with four other houses from the Home and Industrial Arts Group on sites landscaped by the James W. Owen Nurseries. Before the move, Robert Bartlett expressed plans "to reconstruct and landscape them for sale exactly as they were on the Fair grounds."¹³ According to a contemporary article, Bartlett appears to have specific landscaping in mind; "The homes will be reconstructed along Lake Front Drive in Beverly Shores in a permanent location, especially landscaped to suit each particular type of architecture."¹⁴ Despite these claims, Bartlett neither replicated the exact fair siting nor did he appear to have created a landscaping scheme adapted to each house. By grouping the five houses together, however, he managed to recreate a sense of an "exhibition group" at Beverly Shores.

In some ways, the Beverly Shores group resembles the site at the Century of Progress Exposition. At the fair, both the Rostone and the Florida House were located on lakeside sites and were oriented toward the lake in the same way that they

¹³ "Six Model Homes Go to Market," Architectural Forum 62, no. 2 (February 1935): 181.

¹⁴ "Modern Homes to Be Moved to Beverly Shores," newspaper article in Ann Carlson's scrapbook, Beverly Shores, Indiana.

are today. The Rostone house had a straight walkway leading to its front door and a curved drive to its garage that resembles the arrangement at Beverly Shores. The Florida Tropical Home had a straight approach to its garage that is similar to the current driveway. At the fair and at Beverly Shores, the Rostone house was located to the left of the Florida Tropical Home. At the fair, however, the two were separated by the Lumber Industries and the Brick Manufacturing Association exhibits.

2. Outbuildings: There are no outbuildings.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

Plans of first and second floors and exterior view. "The Modern Houses of the Century of Progress Exposition." Architectural Forum July 1933, 58.

First and second floor plans, Kuhne, James S. and Percival Goodman. The Florida Tropical Home at A Century of Progress 1933. New York: Kuhne Galleries, 1933, n.p.

Construction details of the terrace rail and a typical wall section. NO SOURCE. IN HABS FILES.

Schematic first and second floor plans, Raley, Dorothy, ed. A Century of Progress: Homes and Furnishings. Chicago: M.A. Ring Company, 1934, 53.

B. Early Views:

Exterior view of Florida House as it appeared during 1934 fair season. Raley, Dorothy, ed. A Century of Progress: Homes and Furnishings. Chicago: M.A. Ring Company, 1934, 52.

C. Bibliography:

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Raley, Dorothy, ed. A Century of Progress: Homes and Furnishings. Chicago: M.A. Ring Company, 1934.

Walter, L. Rohe. "Look Homeward, America!" Review of Reviews and World's Work, October 1934, 27-30.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Ryerson/Burnham libraries at the Art Institute of Chicago (closed summer 1994).

F. Supplemental Material:

Map showing location of Home and Industrial Arts group on fair site. From 1934 Souvenir Map. Collection of David and Sharon Kemerer. Reservation of Use holders of Armco-Ferro House, Beverly Shores, IN.

Map showing layout of Home and Industrial Arts group. From "The Modern Houses of A Century of Progress," The Architectural Forum July 1933, 51.

Chart showing "scientific" research on girder span. From "New Materials and Building Methods" Architectural Record April 1932, 282.

Exterior view of Florida House as it appeared during 1934 fair season. Raley, Dorothy, ed. A Century of Progress: Homes and Furnishings. Chicago: M.A. Ring Company, 1934, 52.

Plans of first and second floors and exterior view. "The Modern Houses of the Century of Progress Exposition." Architectural Forum July 1933, 58.

First and second floor plans, Kuhne, James S. and Percival Goodman. The Florida Tropical Home at A Century of Progress 1933. New York: Kuhne Galleries, 1933, n.p.

View of the bathroom as it appeared in 1933. Kuhne, James S. and Percival Goodman. The Florida Tropical Home at A Century of Progress 1933. New York: Kuhne Galleries, 1933, n.p.

View of the bathroom as it appeared in 1934. Raley, Dorothy, ed. A Century of Progress: Homes and Furnishings. Chicago: M.A. Ring Company, 1934, 60.

Construction details of the terrace rail and a typical wall section. NO SOURCE. IN HABS FILES.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of the Beverly Shores Century of Progress Homes and Historic District was undertaken in the summers of 1993 and 1994 by the Washington Office of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, HABS/HAER Division Chief, and Paul D. Dolinsky, Chief of HABS. The project was cosponsored by the Midwest Regional Office of the National Park Service, Andrew Ketterson, Chief of Cultural Resources and Craig Kenkel, Regional Historic Architect. Additional support was provided by Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, Dale Engquest, Superintendent and William Supernaugh, Assistant Superintendent.

The project was directed by Frederick J. Lindstrom, HABS Supervisory Architect. The field documentation was completed by Project Supervisor, Judith E. Collins and Field Foremen: Joseph A. Boquiren and Laura J. Culberson, with Architecture Technicians: Bert V. Calhoun, II, Eric T. Helgoth, David M. Lefton, Michael J. Seibert, Lillian M. Smith and Lori A. Smith. The historical report and written building surveys were produced by Project Historian Maria F. Ali, under the direction of Catherine Lavoie, HABS Senior Historian and Sarah Allaback, HABS Historian. The large format photography was produced by HABS staff photographer Jack E. Boucher in 1994. Recognition must also go to the individual residents of

FLORIDA TROPICAL HOUSE
HABS NO. IN-242 (Page 14)

the houses and the staff of Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore for their cooperation and assistance.